



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 South 19th Avenue, Bozeman MT 59718
406-994-4042

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1. Project Title: Milwaukee Fishing Access Site Lease Acquisition and Improvement Project

2. Type of Proposed Action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to acquire approximately 1.5 acres of land across the Madison River from the Milwaukee Fishing Access Site (FAS) through a no-cost lease from Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) in order to provide a suitable boat launch site and additional parking along the Madison River.

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action:

Milwaukee FAS is located approximately 1.5 miles east of Three Forks, Montana, just north of Interstate 90 and 200 yards south of the Three Forks Frontage Road; Lat. 45.89925, Long. -111.52495; Section 30, Township 2 North Range 2 East (Figure 1).

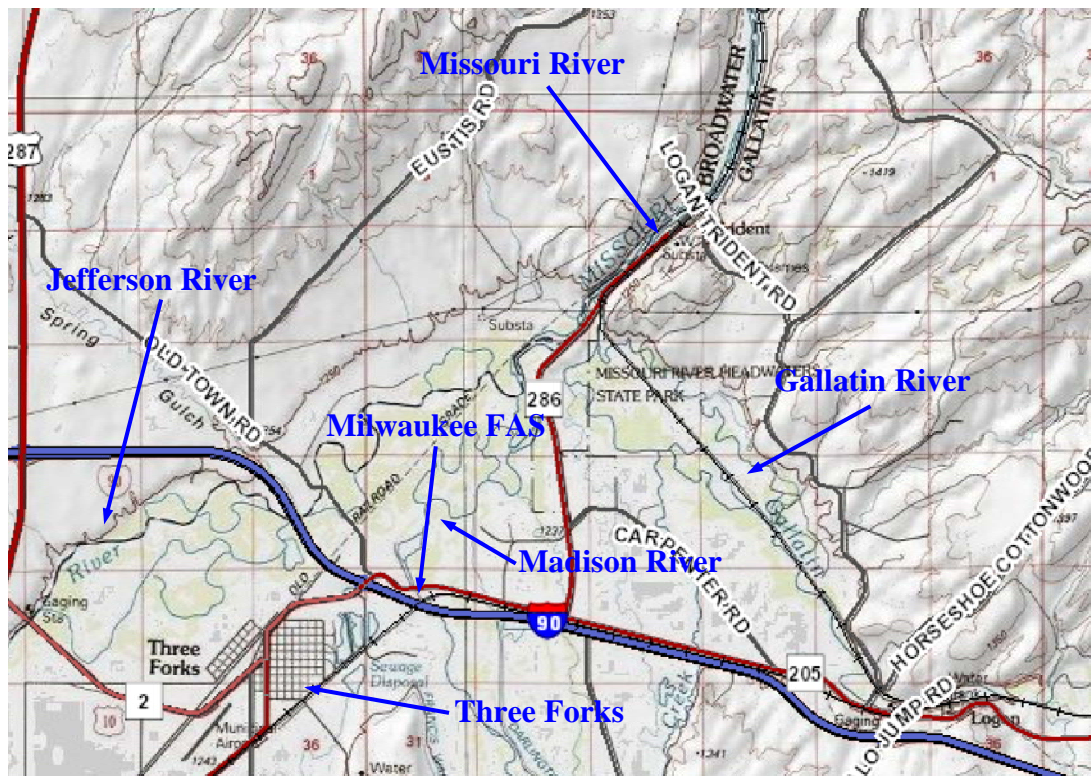


Figure 1 – General Location of Milwaukee FAS, Three Forks, Montana

4. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action:

The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted Section 87-1-605, Montana Code Annotated (MCA), which directs FWP to acquire, develop, and operate a system of fishing accesses. The legislature earmarked a funding account to ensure that the fishing access site program would be implemented. Section 87-1-303, MCA, authorizes the collection of fees and charges for the use of fishing access sites, and contains rule-making authority for their use, occupancy, and protection. Furthermore, Section 23-1-110, MCA, and Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 12.2.433 guide public involvement and comment for improvements at state parks and fishing access sites, which this document provides.

ARM 12.8.602 requires the Department to consider the wishes of the public, the capacity of the site for development, environmental impacts, long-range maintenance, protection of natural features and impacts on tourism as these elements relate to development or improvement to fishing access sites or state parks. This document will illuminate the facets of the Proposed Action in relation to this rule. See *Appendix A* for HB 495 qualification.

5. Objectives for the Action(s):

Milwaukee FAS is located on the Madison River four miles southeast of the headwaters of the Missouri River near Three Forks, Montana. The FAS was acquired in fee title in 1979. Existing facilities at the FAS include a gravel boat launch, parking area, concrete vault latrine, access road, and signs, and includes access to a foot bridge over the river that is part of the Missouri River Legacy Trail system. Since the FAS was developed, a sand bar has developed in the river across from the boat launch. As a result of the shallow water created by the sand bar, access to the Madison River from the FAS is currently limited to wade fishing and hand launching rafts, canoes, and kayaks from the east shore.

In order to provide safe and consistent boat and raft access to the Madison River near Three Forks, FWP proposes to lease 1.5 acres from MDT across the river from the current FAS. The objective of the lease is to develop a gravel boat ramp on the west shore of the Madison River where the water is deeper and more suitable for launching boats.

6. Affected Environment (A brief description of the affected area of the proposed project):

Milwaukee FAS is located on 7 acres of public land owned in fee title by FWP, and the proposed lease is located on 1.5 acres. The current boundaries of Milwaukee FAS are located within the floodway of the Madison River, and the proposed lease is located entirely within the 100-year floodplain of the Madison River. According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program Wetland Mapping Program, a portion of Milwaukee FAS is classified as a temporarily flooded, Freshwater Emergent Wetland with a small area as a seasonally flooded, Freshwater Scrub-Shrub Wetland. There are no permanent surface waters or wetlands on the proposed lease property. Neither Milwaukee FAS nor the proposed lease property provides critical habitat for any wildlife or plant species. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) element occurrence database indicates occurrences of bald eagle (listed as DM by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in the vicinity of the proposed project. No other occurrences of federally ranked, or considered for ranking, animal or plant species have been found within the vicinity of the proposed project. The search indicated that great blue heron, veery, pinyon jay, golden eagle, sage thrasher, Brewer's sparrow, bobolink, long-billed curlew, ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, burrowing owl, Clark's nutcracker, hoary bat, little brown myotis, greater short-horned lizard, and plains spadefoot, Montana Animal Species of Concern, have been observed in or near the proposed project site. Mealy primrose, annual Indian paintbrush, Ute ladies'-tresses, and beaked spikerush, Montana Plant Species of Concern, have also been observed in the vicinity of the proposed project site.

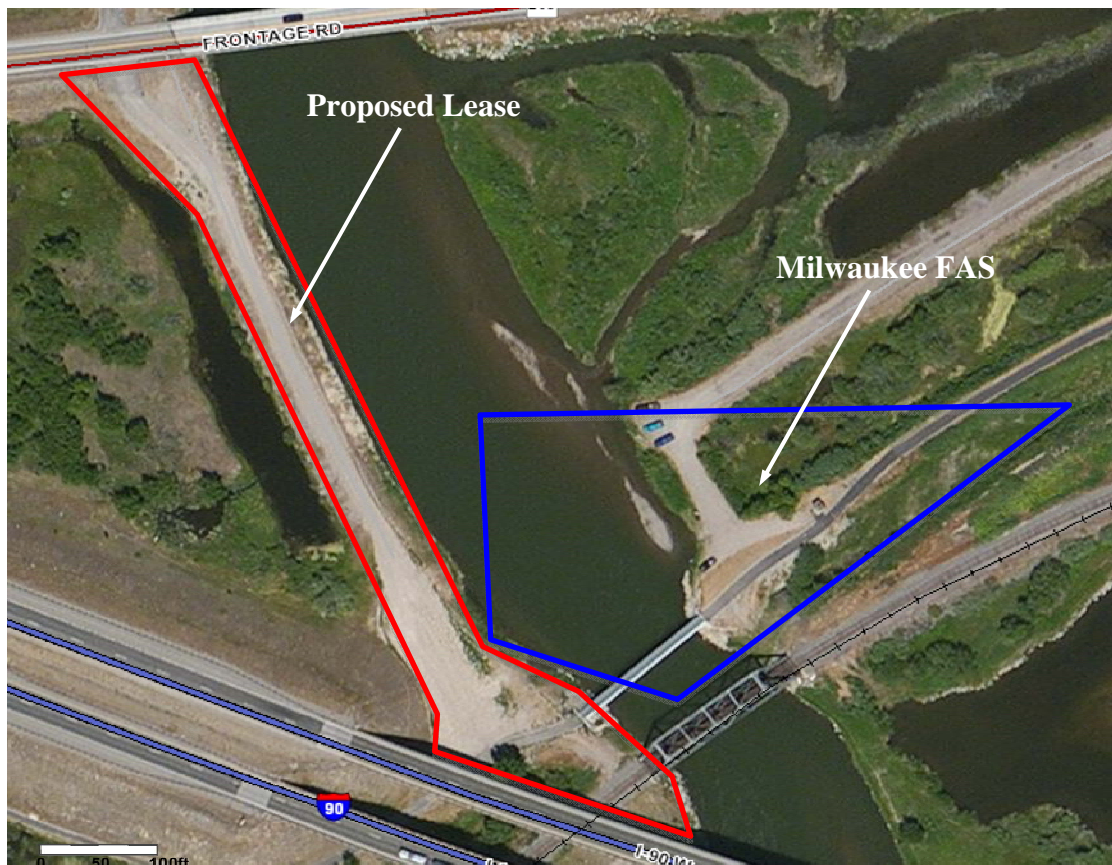


Figure 2 - Milwaukee FAS Parcel Map and Proposed Lease, Three Forks, Montana

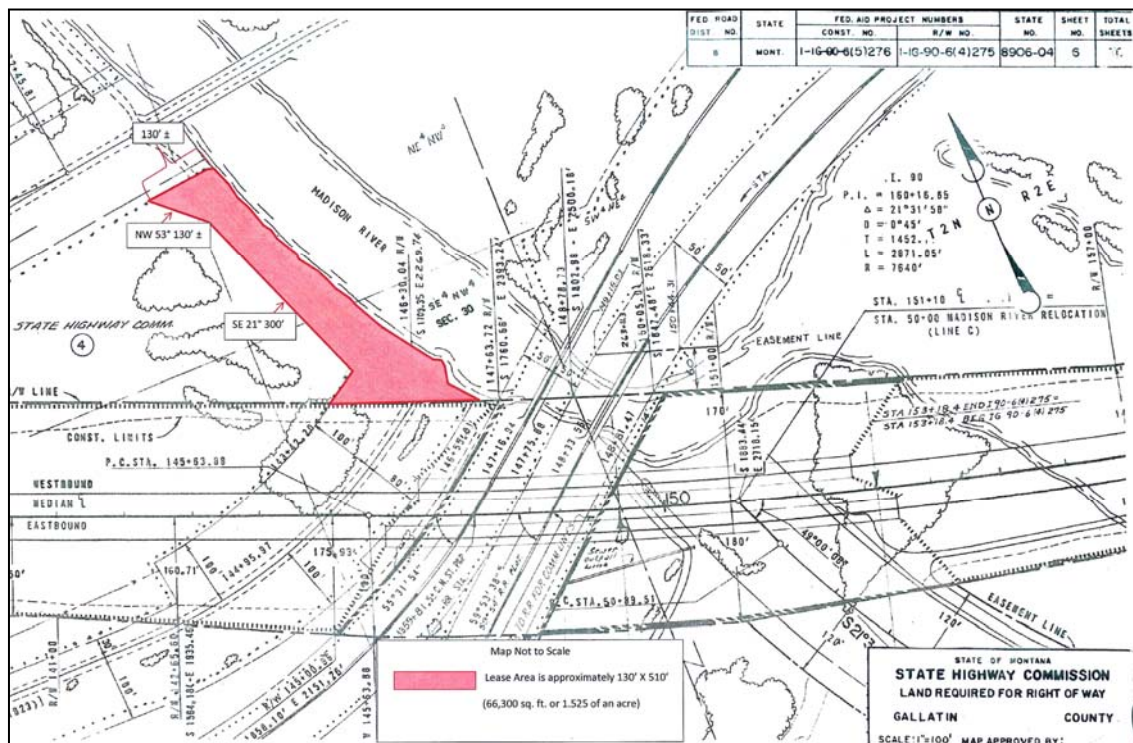


Figure 3 - Milwaukee FAS Preliminary Lease Survey, Three Forks, Montana

7. Description of Project:

FWP proposes to lease approximately 1.5 acres of land across the Madison River from Milwaukee FAS and improve the existing access road, pioneered boat launch, and pioneered parking area on the leased site. Proposed improvements to the existing facilities would include: grading and graveling the pioneered boat ramp; grading, graveling, and designating parking on the existing parking area; and installing directional and informational signs. FWP would maintain the existing access road to the leased property. The site would be considered part of the existing Milwaukee FAS property, and FWP would manage both sites. The Missouri River Legacy Trail system foot-bridge would connect the leased site to Milwaukee FAS providing access to the latrine (Figures 2 and 3).

8. List any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency that has Overlapping or Additional Jurisdiction:

(a) **Permits:** Permits would be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permits</u>
Gallatin County	Floodplain and Sanitation Permit

(b) **Funding:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
▪ Lease from MDT	\$ 0
▪ Site Improvement	\$15,000

9. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on the Milwaukee Fishing Access Site Proposed Parcel Acquisition and Road Realignment Project, the Proposed Action and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *Three Forks Herald* and the *Helena Independent Record*.
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.
- Draft EA's will be available at the FWP Region 3 Headquarters in Bozeman and the FWP State Headquarters in Helena.
- A news release will be prepared and distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 3 issues.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

If requested within the comment period, FWP will schedule and conduct a public meeting on this Proposed Action.

10. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (15) fifteen days. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., December 6, 2017 and can be emailed to rheagney@mt.gov or mailed to the addresses below:

Milwaukee FAS Proposed Acquisition and Improvement Project
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 3
1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

11. List of Agencies Consulted/Contacted During Preparation of the EA:

- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Montana Natural Heritage Program
- State Historic Preservation Office

12. Names, Address, and Phone Number of Project Sponsor:

Ray Heagney, FWP Region 3 FAS Manager, 1400 South 19th Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59718, (406) 994-4042

13. Other Pertinent Information:

After implementation of the proposed project, Milwaukee FAS (Madison River mile 4) would be the only FAS managed by FWP with a developed boat launch between Greycliff (Madison River mile 20), Gallatin Forks (Gallatin River mile 13), and Drouillard (Jefferson River mile 8). Three Forks Ponds (Missouri River mile 1), managed by the City of Three Forks, and Missouri Headwaters State Park (Missouri River mile 0), managed by Montana State Parks, also have gravel boat launches. The Milwaukee FAS is part of the Missouri River Legacy Trail system linking the FAS with the community of Three Forks and Missouri Headwaters State Park.

PART II. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A, the **Proposed Alternative**, and **Alternative B**, the **No Action Alternative**, were considered.

- **Alternative A (Proposed Alternative)** is as described in Part I, paragraph 9 (Description of Project), to lease at no cost approximately 1.5 acres of land from MDT and improve the existing pioneered boat ramp and parking area. There are beneficial consequences to acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative**.
- **Alternative B (No Action Alternative)** Under the No Action Alternative, the FWP lease acquisition and improvement would be denied and the area would remain as an unimproved site with a pioneered boat ramp and parking area. Without taking additional action, FWP anticipates that access to the Madison River at Milwaukee FAS would continue to be limited to wade fishing and hand launching boats, canoes, rafts, and kayaks. The No Action Alternative would have no significant or potentially negative environmental impacts or consequences. The FAS would continue on with present conditions and the pioneered use on the MDT land would remain the same.

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented: Only the proposed alternative and the no action alternative were considered. There were no other alternatives that were deemed reasonably available nor prudent. Neither the proposed alternative nor the no action alternative would have significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

Describe any Alternatives considered and eliminated from Detailed Study:

None. Only the proposed alternative and the no action alternative were considered. There was no other alternative that were deemed reasonably available, or prudent. Neither the **Proposed Alternative** nor the **No Action Alternative** would have significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

List and explain proposed mitigating measures (stipulations): None

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Abbreviated Checklist – The degree and intensity determines extent of Environmental Review. An abbreviated checklist may be used for those projects that are not complex, controversial, or are not in environmentally sensitive areas.

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		1
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		2
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		3
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		4
5. Water quality, quantity & distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		5
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		6
7. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		7
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		8
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		9
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		10
11. Aesthetics				X		11

1. No designated critical habitat for any wildlife species is located near the proposed project. According to the MNHP, observations of bald eagle (listed as DM by the USFWS) have been recorded in the vicinity of the proposed project. No other occurrences of federally ranked, or considered for ranking, animal or plant species have been found within the vicinity of the proposed project.
2. The proposed project would have only minor and short-term impacts on wildlife and native plant species. Resident or transient wildlife may temporarily leave the area during construction but would return upon project completion.
3. No new animal or plant species would be introduced to the site as a result of the proposed project.

- 4.** No native vegetation would be removed during improvement of the boat ramp and parking area. The elimination of any non-native vegetation would not change the overall abundance and diversity of plant species within the area. Due to prior land use, native vegetation has been disturbed in the area of the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project would have no impact on native vegetation in the area.
- 5.** The proposed project would have no negative impact on water quality, quantity, and distribution. In fact, water quality would improve by reducing erosion and sedimentation of the river by improving the pioneered boat ramp and parking area on the lease site. There are no delineated wetlands within the project area on the lease property.
- 6.** The proposed project would have no impact on water rights or reservation.
- 7.** The proposed project would cause limited displacement of soils, but the developments would not substantially effect geological features or establish new erosion patterns. Soil disruption for this site is localized. Erosion control measures would be in effect, and disturbed area would be reseeded.
- 8.** Minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions would be created by construction equipment during construction. However, the construction time is short and human effects would be limited due to the sparse population near the property.
- 9.** This project uses no federal funds, so the Federal 106 Regulations do not apply. Prior to the commencement of construction, FWP would contact the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and seek a concurrence from SHPO on FWP recommendations for the project. If cultural materials are discovered during construction, work would cease and SHPO would be contacted for a more in-depth investigation.
- 11.** Because the project area is small and the vicinity around the lease site is already disturbed by Milwaukee FAS, Interstate 90, the railroad tracks, and the Missouri River Legacy Trail, the proposed project would have no additional impact on the aesthetics of the area.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		1
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		2
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		3.
4. Agricultural production				X		4
5. Human health				X		5
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational activities				X		7
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		8
9. Distribution & density of population and housing				X		9
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		11

1. The proposed project would have no impact on social structures and cultural diversity.

2. The proposed project would have no impact on existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat.

3. The proposed project would have no impact on local and state taxes and tax revenues.

4. The proposed lease site is not under agricultural production and the proposed project would have no impact on agriculture in the vicinity of the FAS.

5. The proposed project would have no impact on human health and would improve public safety.
7. The proposed developments would improve recreational opportunities within the community.
8. The proposed project would not be in conflict with locally adopted environmental plans and goals.
- 9 & 11 The proposed project would not require additional government services except for FWP maintenance. The project would have no impact on commercial activity in the vicinity of the FAS.

PART IV. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

All of the pertinent or potential impacts of the project have been reviewed, discussed, and analyzed. The project reviewed was not complex, controversial, or located in an environmentally sensitive area. The project being implemented is on land previously disturbed by Interstate 90, railroad tracks, the Missouri River Legacy Trail, and pioneered use that, together with the insignificant environmental effects of the proposed action, indicates that this should be considered the final version of the environmental assessment. There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative.

PART V. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? No

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant? Individually, the proposed actions have minor impacts. However, it was determined that there are no significant or potentially significant cumulatively impacts. Cumulative impacts have been assessed considering any incremental impact of the proposed action when they are combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, and no significant impacts or substantially controversial issues were found. There are no extreme hazards created with this project and there are no conflicts with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan.

Recommendation and justification concerning preparation of EIS:

There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative; therefore, an EIS is not required.

PART VI. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

Individuals or groups contributing to, or commenting on, this EA:

- Ray Heagney, FWP Region 3 FAS Manager, 1400 South 19th Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59718, (406) 994-6987
- MT Fish Wildlife and Parks

EA prepared by:

Andrea Darling, Darling Natural Resource Consulting, Montana City, MT 59634

Date Completed:

July 25, 2017

Describe public involvement, if any:

This draft EA will be advertised on FWP's web site and through a legal ad in the *Three Forks Herald, Three Forks, MT* announcing a public comment period. A press release will also announce the project and comment period.